

Inspection report
BARNET
Local Education Authority

Date of inspection: September 2003

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Basic information about the LEA

Name of LEA:	Barnet LEA
Address of LEA:	The Old Town Hall 1 Friern Barnet Lane London N11 3DL
Lead inspector:	Brian Blake HMI
Date of inspection:	September 2003

Introduction

1. The inspection of Barnet local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission, under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of LEAs' work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based partly on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with elected members, staff in the education service and in other council directorates. Group discussions were held with representatives of schools and some of the LEA's partners. Telephone interviews were held with three primary schools, one junior school and two secondary schools. Her Majesty's Inspectors also made six school visits, as part of the inspection of the LEA's support for the provision of education for pupils who have no school place. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all its schools. The response rate was 50%. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement, which is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria (and the guidance notes on functions of a LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted) can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numerical grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of a LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of its performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numerical grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report that comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gave star ratings for each local LEA for a range of local services. This report focuses on the local LEA's work to support school improvement.

Commentary

6. Barnet is the second largest of the London boroughs. There are many prosperous wards, but some areas of deprivation, which makes the overall socio-economic context of the LEA better than average. The population is ethnically mixed. Just over one quarter is from non-white ethnic groups. There is also a large Jewish community, which is approximately 15% of the population, and is larger than that found in any other area of the country.

7. The history of the LEA since the previous inspection is one of unsatisfactory progress. The pre-inspection school survey rated the quality of support since the previous inspection as one of worst in any LEA surveyed in the current year. At the time of the 1999 inspection, the LEA was satisfactory overall. There were six areas where the LEA's provision was good. There were also six unsatisfactory areas.

8. Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the political administration, and a number of new senior officer appointments and major restructuring, with redefined roles and responsibilities across the education service. Many of these changes have occurred over the last 12 months, with some being completed just prior to the start of this inspection and others still proceeding. The LEA's officers and councillors interviewed during the inspection believe these changes are crucial to the future of education in Barnet.

9. This is currently an unsatisfactory LEA. Overall, there are too many unsatisfactory areas and too few good ones. Too many areas have declined in quality since the previous inspection, particularly in some fundamental aspects of the LEA's support for school improvement. Some of the unsatisfactory areas from the previous inspection remain, most notably in special educational needs (SEN), where the LEA's strategy is poor and its functions to support school improvement are unsatisfactory. The quality of support for social inclusion has been maintained. Many areas are highly satisfactory, although there has been a decline in the LEA's effectiveness in combating racism. While the quality of corporate areas has been maintained, further work is needed on aligning the major plans that include the education service. Barnet has a high number of schools where levels of attainment are at least in line or better than the standards found nationally. This is true for all key stages. However, there is currently limited added value from the LEA to this overall performance.

There are particular strengths in:

- support for numeracy; and
- health, safety, welfare and child protection.

There are weaknesses in:

- the extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention with its schools;
 - the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve;
 - support for school leadership and management;
 - the effectiveness of the performance management services to support school
-

improvement;

- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- property services;
- information and communication technology (ICT) in school administration;
- the strategy for special educational needs;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its special educational needs functions to support school improvement;
- the effectiveness of combating racism; and
- the clarity and coherence of corporate plans.

The effectiveness of the following functions is poor:

- cleaning and caretaking; and
- the strategy for SEN.

10. The LEA's capacity to improve is satisfactory. The major challenge for the LEA is to ensure that the many changes that have occurred over the past 12 months help improve the overall quality of services that support all aspects of school improvement. The LEA is beginning to demonstrate a willingness to tackle weaknesses. Councillors and senior LEA officers have set themselves an agenda for improvement of services to schools, and the protection of school budgets and restructuring of the education service are clear examples of the authority's desire to improve its education service and maintain high school standards. The management from corporate officers and the leadership of elected members are crucial, and their willingness to address the recommendations of this report, and to continue to hold to account the LEA's officers, is fundamental to the future success of Barnet LEA.

11. The LEA also needs to establish productive relationships with its schools. There are some early indications that these relationships are improving, and that the director of education and children and the chief education officer are gaining the confidence of headteachers. The establishment of more effective consultative groups is helping this process. Schools, also, must take an active role in this partnership. Continued regular dialogue between the LEA's officers, councillors and schools, backed up by robust evidence of the LEA's effectiveness, is required to bring about the changes required.

12. The performance of the education service is partly reflected in the CPA for education, published in December 2002. This assessment gave the education service two stars for current performance and three stars (highest grading) for its capacity to make further improvement.

Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

Context

13. The majority of socio-economic factors that existed at the time of the previous inspection of Barnet LEA remain. The borough has a relatively high level of prosperity, but there are a small number of wards with significant deprivation. There are currently around 315,000 people in the borough, which is around 10% lower than at the time of the 1991 census.

14. The number of pupils in primary schools rose steadily from 1991 until 2000, but has begun to decline. The primary population is around 26,700. There are four nursery schools, 16 infant schools, 15 junior schools and 60 primary schools. One primary school has been designated as having serious weaknesses, and one as requiring special measures. Four primary schools have achieved Beacon status: two primaries, one junior and one infant school. There are 21 secondary schools catering for around 21,300 pupils. One secondary school has been designated as having serious weaknesses and one as requiring special measures. There are three Beacon secondary schools, and 10 with specialist status. There are four special schools: one for ages 2-11, one for ages 5-11 and two for 11-19 year olds. There are two pupil referral units (PRUs). Currently, 93% of three and four-year-olds are in early years educational settings.

15. Entitlement to free school meals is in line with the national average at both primary and secondary level. One-third of pupils come from minority ethnic groups, which is above the national average. There are more pupils with English as an additional language in primary and secondary schools than the national average and in similar LEAs¹.

16. The percentage of primary-age pupils in special schools is below the national average, and in line with similar LEAs. It is below both comparators for secondary-age pupils. The percentage of primary-age pupils with a statement of special educational need is in line with that found nationally and in similar LEAs. At secondary level, it is below both comparators.

Performance

17. The performance of pupils in baseline assessment is generally in line with children of a similar age.

18. At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' performance in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with the averages found nationally and in similar LEAs. Girls perform better than boys in all three areas.

¹ Barnet's statistical neighbours are Bromley, Croydon, Harrow, Kingston-upon-Thames, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames, Stockport, Sutton and Trafford.

19. At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils perform well above the national average in English, and above in mathematics and science. Against similar LEAs, pupils' performance is broadly in line in all three areas. Girls achieve higher standards in English, but perform less well than boys in mathematics and science.

20. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils perform above the national average in English and mathematics, and in line in science. They perform in line with similar LEAs' averages in all three subjects. Girls outperform boys in English, with the attainment gap increasing from that seen at the previous key stage. In science and mathematics, boys achieve marginally better than girls.

21. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils perform above the national average for five or more A*-C grades and average point score, and in line for one or more A*-G grades. With the exception of one or more A*-G grades, which is below, pupils' performance against similar LEAs is in line with all other indicators. Girls outperform boys in all comparative measures.

22. There is some under-achievement of minority ethnic groups at each key stage. This applies, in particular, to pupils of Black Caribbean heritage across all key stages, but significantly more so at Key Stages 3 and 4.

23. Rates of improvement since the previous inspection vary across the key stages. At Key Stage 1, Barnet pupils achieve broadly in line in with the national trend in all three core subjects. At Key Stage 2, pupils achieve in line with the national trend in English and science, and below in mathematics. At Key Stage 3, pupils achieve in line with the national trend in English, below in mathematics and well below in science. At Key Stage 4, Barnet pupils achieve in line with the national trend for one or more A*-G grades, and below for average point score and five or more A*-C grades.

24. The rate of progress of pupils between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is well above that found nationally. It is in line between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, and above between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

25. The attendance of pupils in primary and secondary schools is similar to the averages found nationally. Authorised absences are in line at primary, but below at secondary. Unauthorised absences are above at primary and in line at secondary. With the exception of unauthorised absences at primary, which are above, all other measures are in line with the averages found in similar LEAs.

26. Exclusions from primary and secondary schools are in line with the national and similar LEAs' averages.

27. The percentage of primary schools that were good or very good at the time of their last Ofsted inspection is below that found nationally and in similar LEAs. The percentage rate of secondary schools that are good or very good is broadly in line with the national and similar LEAs' averages.

Funding

28. Barnet's overall education formula spending share (EFSS) per pupil for 2003/04 was 9% below the London average and 5% above the average for England. The school formula spending share per pupil for 2003/04 was 9% below the London average and 8% above the average for England.

29. The council has spent at approximately 1% above the education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the past three years, and for 2003/04 it has set a budget a quarter of 1% above the EFSS. Barnet passed on to schools 97.3 % of the education funding increase in 2003/04, and has also taken up all of its Standards Fund options.

30. The level of delegation for 2002/03 was very high. It was 90%, compared with an average of 87% for all London boroughs. The table below shows that the primary individual schools budget (ISB) per pupil for 2002/03 was well above the averages for statistical neighbours and all London boroughs, and was 16% above the national average. The ISB for secondary was well above statistical neighbours, above the London borough average, and 11% above the national average.

	Barnet LEA £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	London authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary ISB	2577	2263	2365	2223
Secondary ISB	3257	3002	3183	2929

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002-2003.

31. The table below shows that, with the exception of funding for special educational needs, which is higher than the England average, Barnet's centrally retained funding is lower than comparative groups in all areas.

	Barnet LEA £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	London authorities £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Central management	43	53	57	51
Other strategic management (excluding existing early retirements)	13	22	21	25
School improvement	21	29	37	30

Access (excluding transport)	24	57	61	52
SEN	186	204	196	160

Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data 2002-2003.

32. In 2002/03, the total SEN budget, including the schools' and the LEA's elements, was high at 19% of the total local schools budget. The national average was 16%.

33. Because of its socio-economic profile, the council does not benefit from major programmes of government funding that are focused on urban deprivation or community regeneration. The LEA has, however, secured formula capital allocations from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as a result of satisfactory progress on its asset management plan, and is also currently preparing a Building Schools for the Future bid. The bid is for the replacement or partial replacement of school buildings. The DfES did not approve an earlier Private Finance Initiative bid for the replacement of 34 primary schools.

Council structure

34. The council has a leader and a cabinet of 10 members, one of whom has responsibility for education, children and lifelong learning. There are 33 Conservative, 23 Labour and six Liberal Democrats on the council. There are overview and scrutiny committees that correspond closely to each of the cabinet portfolios, including one for education and children.

35. The council's officers are led by the chief executive and four second-tier strategic directors, one of whom is responsible for education and children. These officers, together with assistant chief executives and six third-tier officers, including the chief education officer, make up the management board for the council.

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

36. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's strategy for school improvement was satisfactory. It remains so. The two key documents that support school improvement are the Education Development Plan (EDP) and the Barnet excellence cluster strategic plan, both of which focus clearly on a range of national and local priorities.

37. The EDP was originally graded unsatisfactory by Ofsted and the DfES, but officers responded quickly to address the concerns and, after re-submission, Barnet was awarded a highly satisfactory grade. Following an evaluation of the first two terms of implementation, a revised EDP has been written. The plan retains the five national and three local priorities, but the activities areas have been revised to reflect more accurately the work completed, and other areas that are now in need of attention. The priorities are as follows:

- raise standards in early years;
- raising attainment in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3;

-
- raise standards in 14 – 19 education;
 - raise standards for individual pupils and groups of pupils;
 - improve standards in schools causing concern;
 - raise standards in ICT;
 - improve schools as professional learning communities; and
 - improve access to education by reviewing and enhancing whole school approaches.

38. The monitoring and evaluation procedures are satisfactory. Lead officers take responsibility for co-ordinating the quarterly evaluation of priority activities. Information is routinely collected from a variety of sources, including feedback from officers' visits to schools, in-service training, and quantitative data that relate specifically to activity areas. This process is satisfactory in terms of overviewing all activity areas, but there are weaknesses in the system. The evidence used for evaluating progress is not sufficiently robust in all activity areas. Too often, impact is measured in terms of completion of the activity, rather than in the differences seen in the targeted provision.

39. Progress in implementing the EDP has been satisfactory overall, but there has been slippage in some important areas: for example, on improving standards in schools causing concern. Although the LEA is working hard to improve its support to schools identified as causing concern, progress to date has been too slow and piecemeal. Also, the success criteria in some activity areas are too imprecise and vague. This limits, therefore, the potential to evaluate more accurately progress in all activities over the life of the plan.

40. Officers continue to work towards a more accurate methodology to assess the cost-effectiveness of the EDP. A recording system, which identifies officers' support and actions within all the priority activities, is being considered, but the software that is intended to be used has yet to be tested rigorously for accuracy and validity. At present, the costs of different activities are, as yet, only estimates of the true costs.

Recommendations

In order to evaluate the EDP more effectively, the LEA should:

- accurately assess the cost-effectiveness of all priority activities; and
- use measurable success criteria to evaluate implementation.

41. Although officers report the findings of evaluation with consultative headteacher groups, the school survey suggests that much more needs to be done to convince all schools that the EDP is sufficiently relevant to meet their specific needs. Recent work by some schools, however, of aligning the EDP priorities with school improvement plans is an encouraging start.

42. The Barnet excellence cluster has been running for just over a year, and currently involves 22 schools, 18 of which are primary. Work has progressed satisfactorily in learning support units, learning mentors and improving the provision for gifted and talented pupils. Links to the EDP are satisfactory, and cross-referenced in the cluster strategy document. Lead officers ensure consistency of approach within the cluster, and across the LEA more broadly. Evaluation of the initiative is satisfactory. Termly evaluations are carried out, and detailed end-of-year reports are produced for senior officers and elected members. These reports are satisfactory, and comment in detail on the implementation of each strand area. However, while the reports suggest future issues to consider, there is no accompanying action plan to identify how these will be tackled over the coming year.

Recommendation

In order to implement the Barnet excellence cluster initiative more effectively, the LEA should:

- ensure that all strand evaluation reports lead to an action plan for future work.

The allocation of resources to priorities

43. At the time of the previous inspection, this area was satisfactory, with a recommendation that the allocation of resources should be more transparent to schools. Sound progress has been made on the recommendation, particularly in the last 12 months, and the area remains satisfactory overall.

44. Barnet has made sound progress in making the reasons for financial decisions clearer to schools. Good use was made of external financial consultants to review the actions taken by the council during the 2003/04 budget-setting process. The consultants' report provided helpful independent evidence to headteachers to confirm that all reasonable steps had been taken to prioritise school budgets.

45. The council has given priority to education expenditure since the previous inspection, and has spent slightly above the education SSA over the last four years. In the current financial year, the commitment to education, and particularly schools, has continued at the expense of other services. In 2003/04, the council cut £11 million of funding to other departments to protect the education budget. The overall council reserves have been depleted by expenditure exceeding the actual budget for 2002/03, and revenue reserves now stand at around £2 million. This is insufficient to cover any unbudgeted demands and, in particular, any failure to make budget cuts.

46. There is limited medium-term financial planning and, apart from prioritising education, council budgets have not yet been realigned with the other priorities in the corporate plan published this year. Education has also been prioritised in the council capital programme. There is some budget growth and budget realignment within education targeted towards addressing identified weaknesses.

47. Until recently, the education centrally retained budgets have not reflected actual spending in a number of areas. The base budget in 2003/04 has now been adjusted and increased significantly in areas such as special educational needs and statutory central

management. This has meant that external benchmarking and comparisons with other LEAs have been inaccurate prior to this financial year.

48. Effective support is provided to individual schools in setting budgets, including licensed deficit budgets during this financial year. The LEA has taken all reasonable steps to work with schools that are having difficulties setting a balanced budget for 2003/04.

49. Simplification of the Fair Funding formula and changes to how additional educational need/SEN is allocated within the formula have been well managed. Good, early consultation on the principles of potential changes, supplemented by detailed calculations of likely impact at individual school level, has given headteachers every opportunity to make informed decisions.

50. Budget monitoring has significantly improved within education during the current financial year. Monthly monitoring reports now include full explanations of variances against planned budget each month and a forecast of the year-end position.

51. Suitable actions are starting to be put in place to provide SEN provision locally, in an attempt to reduce the significantly high number of out-of-borough placements. Targeted effort to reduce the escalating SEN transport costs has taken place, through changing the policy on access to transport and starting to co-ordinate individual journeys. Improvements have been implemented in the budget management and control of the SEN budget through the recent appointment of a specific budget officer. The post holder is rightly involved in most meetings where expenditure is potentially committed to the SEN budget.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

52. The promotion of continuous improvement, including Best Value, is unsatisfactory.

53. The recommendations from the previous inspection were acted upon only very recently. In addition, the three Best Value reviews completed in education since 1999 have lacked rigour and challenge. Action has not been taken on areas identified for improvement.

54. A management review by external consultants was initiated by the council in March 2002 and reported in May 2002. The self-evaluation prepared for this inspection was fairly accurate, and reflected well the progress made by the LEA in this area over the past six months.

55. A good corporate framework, 'firststat', is now in place to monitor progress made on the priorities in the corporate plan, but some education targets included are inaccurate. An education service performance management plan is also in place. Separate team plans underpin the performance management plan. However, there is a wide variation in the standard and content of these. Some deal with tasks to be done by individual officers rather than required outcomes to improve services.

56. The evaluation of service delivery is weak. There are limited opportunities for headteachers to influence or change the quality of the services they receive. There has been continued lack of investment in information and communication technology and management

systems since the previous inspection. There are now some recovery and development plans in place, although, at the time of the inspection, none had been implemented.

57. Previous management team agendas show matters raised by officers for improvement, but no action was taken. There is evidence of delivery in the past six months, including the effective implementation of a major reorganisation within a very short time and management of a difficult funding settlement.

58. The council received an unqualified opinion on the Best Value Performance Plan for 2003-2004. However, the lack of robust and accurate performance indicators were a weakness. Education performance indicators were more reliable than those of other council departments, although these also had some weaknesses.

Section 2: Support for school improvement

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

59. There is wide variation in the support for school improvement. The support for numeracy remains good, and support for literacy, human resources, governors, and assuring the supply and quality of teachers are all highly satisfactory. New areas of activity, such as support for Key Stage 3 are satisfactory. Some of the shortcomings in the range of performance data have been addressed since the previous inspection, but its use to inform decisions about challenge and intervention in schools is weak.

60. There remain some significant weaknesses in key services. Progress in tackling the school improvement issues identified in the previous inspection has been too slow. The LEA's officers are aware of the areas for development, and have begun to take action to address them. The recent reorganisation of the service is a clear statement of intent to provide a more robust service to support school improvement.

61. The school survey showed a high level of dissatisfaction in these areas. However, schools interviewed as part of this inspection were positive about the restructuring and appointment of new officers. They were also hopeful that the changes would lead to greater consistency in support, monitoring and intervention.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

62. At the time of the previous inspection, while most aspects of the work of the advisory and other services in contributing to school improvement were satisfactory, their combined overall effectiveness was unsatisfactory. This remains the case.

63. Major changes have been made to the organisation and staffing of the inspection and advisory service since the previous inspection and, while it is too early to judge the effectiveness of recent officer appointments, there is a shared enthusiasm among staff to improve the service. Changes have been made in most key areas, with the intention of bringing greater cohesion to the support for schools. Different parts of the education service have been brought together physically from across the borough and are now located on one site. This is a positive move, undertaken for sound reasons. However, in several areas the level of change has been considerable, and many staff are still coming to terms with new responsibilities, expectations and adaptations to previous practice. Some training needs, such as those of learning network inspectors, have been recognised, but there is no formal training plan across the service, and the process of induction and training for all staff taking on new roles is not yet complete.

64. Performance management of services was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and it remains so. This aspect has been inconsistently promoted across all services, and in some areas was discontinued. Currently, the systematic evaluation of performance is insufficiently embedded across each service and this is unsatisfactory. In some services where targets have been maintained, there is an over-emphasis on quantitative indicators of performance, with the linkage to raising standards in schools unclear. Officers

have recognised the shortcomings, and a new system, introduced in May 2003 as part of the restructuring of the service, is at a very early stage of development. It sensibly includes a programme of appraisal, linking individual performance targets to those of service plans. However, staff have yet to undertake one-to-one reviews of their performance or set individual targets.

Monitoring, challenge, and intervention

65. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's work in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools was unsatisfactory. It remains so.

66. Current policy and procedures, revised since September 2003, place learning network inspectors in the key roles of monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools. The concerns expressed at the time of the previous inspection about the consistency of monitoring and challenge by linked inspectors has remained, and the LEA's action to address them has been too slow.

67. All schools are placed into one of four differentiated categories, ranging from light touch to more intensive monitoring requiring up to 15 days. However, practice is inconsistent with written procedures. Allocations of time differ in practice, and some schools receive more than their notional entitlement. Criteria for categorisation are too broadly defined, and focus on short-term support needs at the expense of challenge. This leads to inconsistencies in the way officers apply the criteria when categorising schools, and in notifying schools of their category. Significantly, most headteachers interviewed as part of this inspection were unclear about their category, the criteria for determining it, or their entitlement to support.

68. Schools identified by the LEA as causing concern are placed in categories three and four. Some of these schools, however, are also unclear about the category they are allocated to, and several of the LEA's different files contain conflicting information. Schools designated by Ofsted as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses have action plans to address their needs and are clear about their categorisation.

69. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has reduced visits to schools, including those that are high-performing. All schools, irrespective of category, receive a minimum of three days a year of linked inspector time. The visits, which take place around a common agenda for schools, allow time for inspectors to familiarise themselves with the school, to monitor progress, set targets, moderate school self-evaluation procedures, and identify support needs.

70. The LEA now recognises that weaknesses in current policies and practice remain, and has begun, belatedly, to tackle the issues. Decisive action was taken. All link inspectors have been replaced, and the process of consultation with schools on new draft policies and procedures for implementation in January 2004 has begun. These are positive changes, but it is too early to judge their overall effectiveness.

The focusing of the LEA's support on areas of greatest need

71. No inspection fieldwork was carried out in this area. At the time of the previous inspection, support for areas of greatest need was satisfactory. Evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation and from documentation provided for the inspection indicates that this aspect continues to be satisfactory.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools

72. The LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It remains so.

73. Access to and use of performance data by the LEA have improved since the previous inspection. Data to identify the performance of minority ethnic pupils and looked after children are regularly compiled and used to inform the LEA's and schools' planning. Useful local data packages have been developed and are used by some primary schools in comparing and analysing the performance of individual pupils and in benchmarking whole school performance. Similar packages are under development for secondary schools. In September 2003, every secondary school received, for the first time, performance data for Year 7 pupils. This is a welcome development, but the LEA has taken this issue forward too slowly. Greater reliability of data has enabled the LEA to identify more clearly the expectations for performance. This underpins target-setting and is suitably used by consultants to identify schools requiring further intensive support in literacy and numeracy in primary schools, and in the three core subjects at Key Stage 3. Systems to transfer data electronically remain behind the pace of most LEAs. The authority and its schools are beset with difficulties for establishing stable e-mail. The majority of developments have been recent and there is much more to be done to embed the use of data systematically across the education service, and ensure regular and even distribution of data to schools.

Recommendation**In order to develop consistent and timely provision of data:**

- establish, in consultation with schools, an annual programme for distributing and exchanging data.

74. All schools are monitored annually on the basis of data analysis, Ofsted report findings and information from linked inspectors and other council departments, and are then assigned to one of the four categories of support. The performance of all schools is reviewed each term by senior officers.

75. The LEA's procedures for monitoring schools causing concern, and those placed in special measures and with serious weaknesses, are set out in policies and cross-referenced to activities within the EDP. The LEA has identified a significantly high proportion of schools as causing concern, compared with the rates found nationally and in similar LEAs. However, there is mixed success in removing schools quickly from this category. Education Development Plan targets, to reduce progressively the number of schools in categories three and four each year, have been achieved in primary schools where the numbers have fallen sharply from 39 to 30 schools. Although the number of secondary schools in these categories

has increased over the last two years, the proportion of schools placed in special measures, or found to have serious weaknesses, compare favourably with national and similar LEA rates.

76. The progress of schools in these categories is co-ordinated by assigned additional inspectors and monitored by linked inspectors. However, some of the LEA's school files show an uneven pattern of monitoring and effectiveness of support. This was confirmed by schools during the inspection.

Recommendation

In order to regularise procedures for all schools identified as causing concern:

- set in place agreements negotiated with each school that identify the key issues, specific support to address them, timescales to review progress, and clear outcomes that are to be achieved.

77. Feedback from consultants' work and from inspectors' visits is used regularly in termly reviews to inform decision-making about support and categorisation. The LEA has sought to broaden the information-gathering process to include contributions from a range of support services, in order to identify all those aspects of schools' performance that cause concern. However, the LEA's current procedures are unclear about how support provided by advanced skills teachers, Beacon schools and from external consultants is used to inform decision-making. Records of meetings show little evidence of critical, incisive evaluation, or of decisive and timely action to resolve issues. Furthermore, this inactivity is not sufficiently challenged by the chief education officer or elected members.

Recommendations

In order to promote rigour in monitoring procedures:

- establish systems to ensure that information from all agencies providing support is used to inform decision-making about schools' progress; and
- identify clearly in reports: where progress has not been secured: the remedial action to be taken; and the timetable for its implementation.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools

78. No fieldwork was carried out during this inspection. The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation, and from inspection documents, indicates that this area continues to be satisfactory.

Support for literacy

79. No fieldwork was carried out in this area. At the time of the previous inspection, support to schools for raising standards in literacy was highly satisfactory. It remains so.

Support for numeracy

80. This area was not subject to fieldwork. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support to schools for raising standards in numeracy was good. The quality of this support has been maintained.

Support for information and communication technology

81. At the time of the previous inspection, support for information and communication technology was satisfactory. It remains so.

82. Attainment in ICT at Level 5 and above at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above the national average, yet overall standards remain lower than many other subjects. Across the LEA, the number of pupils achieving ICT qualifications at 16 is in line with the averages found nationally and in similar LEAs. However, a number of schools have made significant progress, and in these schools all pupils leave with an ICT qualification.

83. The LEA has been slow to address the recommendations made in the previous inspection report, and the new ICT strategy, although in place from July 2003, has yet to have an effect in schools. Development to support ICT in the curriculum has continued. A small but experienced team of officers provides support at both primary and secondary level.

84. Sound systems have been established over the last 12 months to collect teacher assessment data at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. These data, together with information from other sources, provide the LEA's officers with a clearer and better informed view of standards and progress in all schools. However, these developments are at an early stage, and officers rightly recognise that further advice and support on assessment are needed to improve the robustness of the data. As a result, assessment data form only one part of the information officers use to identify schools requiring further support. Similarly, schools' targets to raise attainment at Key Stage 3 have not been based solely on an analysis of previous ICT performance data.

85. National Grid for Learning resources and, more recently, the Standards Fund ICT grant have been allocated appropriately to schools. The LEA has adopted an approach based on providing equality of access to resources, but the application of this principle remains unclear to schools. Currently, the computer to pupil ratio in secondary schools is good, and above that found nationally and in similar LEAs. By contrast, the ratios for primary schools, special schools and pupil referral units are below that of similar LEAs and national averages. A significant majority of teachers have completed ICT training under the New Opportunities Fund initiative. Completion rates are above those found in similar LEAs and nationally.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

86. This is a new inspection area. The LEA's support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory.

87. The national Key Stage 3 strategy has been implemented effectively, and is a key element in the LEA's plan to raise standards. The LEA has addressed early concerns by adapting the strategy to meet, more closely, the needs of low and high attaining schools, and

securing greater participation of teachers in the training. As a result, schools are supportive of the strategy and very positive about efforts to move to school-based training.

88. The LEA's management of the strategy has been satisfactory. Interim arrangements, following the departure of the previous manager in summer 2003, have interrupted progress and unsettled consultants. However, the team of consultants, seconded from the schools, has quickly gained credibility with teachers through well-prepared training, speed of response to requests, and the quality of their support. Collaborative working between consultants from across the different strands is at a very early stage, and is recognised as an area for further development.

89. Support for English, mathematics and science has, quite rightly, focused on issues emerging from school audits. A positive feature has been the provision of specific training and support, on a one to one basis, in English and science, for inexperienced teachers, middle managers and overseas teachers.

90. The ICT, English, mathematics, science and foundation subject strands have been successfully introduced. Programmes of high quality training and follow-up support have begun with approximately half the schools and have been well received by teachers.

91. Written agreements with schools identified as causing concern have helped to co-ordinate and track support for each strand. However, these are not implemented across all schools, and systems for identifying schools' support needs, allocating the correct level of support, and monitoring and evaluating progress are inconsistent across all strands. The LEA's evaluation of work with intensive support schools during the first two years has shown a variable pattern, with some schools making significant improvement while others declined.

92. There has been little cross-phase collaboration between schools. Consultants have rightly identified this as a priority and have begun to tackle it through focused training in all core subjects, to develop teachers' understanding of pupils' earlier learning in Key Stage 2. The work has been further supported through the implementation of a programme of teachers' visits to observe Year 5 teaching in English and science.

93. Actions to improve transition are at early stage of development across all strands. Work to address the issue of inconsistent transfer of data between Year 6 and Year 7 was completed just prior to this inspection and all secondary schools now have, for the first time, data sets to support target setting and planning for the Year 7 intake.

Support for minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers

94. This area was previously highly satisfactory. It is now satisfactory.

95. Since the previous inspection, the service has been reorganised. It now has a broader and more relevant focus on raising the attainment of all minority ethnic pupils rather than on meeting the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.

96. The previous inspection criticised the lack of robust data to show progress in raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. A comprehensive analysis of attainment data is now undertaken, and results are used to target support on under-performing groups,

particularly Black Caribbean pupils in secondary schools. Most work in this area has occurred over the last 12 months and it is, therefore, too early to judge its impact on attainment.

97. The LEA's officers provide satisfactory support to schools in conducting self-reviews of provision, developing useful and relevant support materials, and providing training focused on raising the attainment of minority ethnic, refugee and Traveller children. The training for staff, conducted jointly with the primary strategy teams, has been particularly helpful. However, attendance at training has varied, and while some courses have been well attended, those for secondary schools have attracted disappointingly low numbers.

98. The work of the LEA's team for supporting Traveller children and refugees has been effective since the previous inspection. This has helped improve attendance in both primary and secondary schools. The attendance of Traveller children has improved by 20% in primary schools and 24% in secondary schools since the previous inspection. The most successful elements of the support have been building effective links with families, and targeting crucial points in a child's school career, such as initial entry to school and transition to secondary school. Faced with a growing number of refugee pupils, the LEA responded quickly and effectively by appointing an additional member of staff to provide support to schools on their effective induction.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

99. This is a new area of work for the LEA. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. The LEA is aware of shortcomings and has begun to deal with them.

100. The LEA has appointed a consultant for the work, and has also developed a sound policy for gifted and talented pupils that builds well upon earlier guidance in the excellence cluster plan.

101. Support has concentrated in the 22 schools involved in the Barnet excellence cluster initiative. Each school has nominated a gifted and talented co-ordinator to take forward developments. In addition, all schools have a policy and every co-ordinator has undertaken a national course of specialist training. The LEA's consultant has played a pivotal role in supporting them in their new roles and in the organisation and provision of additional training.

102. Regular meetings and training have led to a common understanding of the definition of gifted and talented, and to the identification of over 100 pupils for whom additional support has been targeted. However, the provision generally for pupils and the tracking of their progress and achievement has not yet begun. The LEA's consultant has rightly identified this as an area for development, and since the beginning of September has begun to develop systems to collate and analyse data to establish a baseline from which to measure progress. The LEA's current targets for gifted and talented pupils in the EDP, the success criteria, and most tasks are over ambitious and do not accurately reflect the current early stage of development.

*Recommendations***In order to develop further support for gifted and talented pupils:**

- use value added data to set realistic but challenging targets for improvement; and
- establish rigorous systems to monitor pupils' progress and identify where further support needs to be targeted.

103. Interest in the training and work with gifted and talented pupils has spread beyond the cluster. Around 24 schools have begun to develop policies and adopt approaches to identify and support such pupils. The LEA is, quite sensibly, developing further training to support and encourage these schools.

104. In addition, the LEA's literacy, numeracy and early years teams have supported the teaching and learning of able and gifted and talented learners. However, this is not part of a co-ordinated LEA strategy.

105. Over the last three years the LEA has promoted a programme of annual summer schools to support gifted and talented Year 6 pupils in settling into new secondary schools. Recruitment to the courses and the provision of activities have been handled by secondary schools and the take-up has been high. However, the LEA has not been sufficiently active in identifying, collating and disseminating good practice from the summer schools or from other activities taking place across the borough.

*Recommendation***In order to accelerate development and promote greater continuity in the support for gifted and talented pupils:**

- put in place systems to identify and disseminate good practice to all schools throughout the borough.

Support for school leadership and management

106. Support for school leadership and management was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now unsatisfactory. This judgement accords with the LEA's own assessment. Many of the issues are already recognised by the LEA and very recent action either has or is planned to address them. It is, however, too soon to judge their effectiveness.

107. The LEA has a well-established induction programme for newly appointed headteachers. Within the last year, the programme has been modified in response to feedback from headteachers and clearer information about services and the LEA's key contacts is now included. In a further positive move, all new headteachers are assigned an experienced headteacher as a mentor. The LEA's programme to provide support for school leadership and management is currently in preparation and is part of wider developments to define policies for monitoring, challenging and supporting schools.

108. The LEA has made use of headteachers' and consultants' expertise to support schools causing concern. However, the effectiveness of this support in tackling initial difficulties has been limited. Management and leadership needs have not been detected early enough in some schools; in others, the LEA has not provided a satisfactory programme of support quickly or effectively enough to address initial difficulties and prevent further decline.

109. Officers rightly identified self-evaluation as an important aspect of school improvement and self-management. Support for it is weak. Advice and guidance to schools have not kept pace with national developments; the self-evaluation model has been discontinued and support to schools through linked inspectors has been inconsistent. The LEA, recognising inadequacies in its current provision, has developed with schools a new approach for implementation from January 2004.

110. The LEA responds to opportunities to promote good leadership and management and, as a result, a number of pilot groups of one or more schools are undertaking regional and national initiatives. The national professional qualification for headship and programmes with higher education institutions to support curriculum leadership in primary schools are suitably promoted and taken up. Gifted and talented co-ordinators are well supported with specific training to equip them in their role, and a regular support programme of network meetings has been planned. However, despite these developments, overall provision is inconsistent and fragmented. The range of activities does not form part of a cohesive programme to identify adequately new managers' needs. There is no clear strategy for disseminating good practice in leadership and management at all levels.

111. The LEA has taken a positive approach to identifying alternative providers of services. A list of those with a proven track record of reliability is maintained and provided to schools along with general advice about procurement.

112. All schools receive clear financial and performance information to assist them in benchmarking their performance with local schools sharing similar characteristics.

113. Schools currently do not submit a statement with their budget plan each year to show what they will do to implement the principles of Best Value.

Support for governors

114. Support for governors was good at the time of the previous inspection. It is now highly satisfactory. Schools show their approval of the service by high levels of subscription to it.

115. Swift and positive action to address the recommendation from the previous inspection was taken three years ago and, as a result, a regular annual conference for Barnet governors has been successfully established.

116. Vacancies for governors are dealt with effectively by the service and the rates for the LEA's nominated governors are in line with those of similar LEAs. Arrangements for establishing a bank of experienced governors whom the LEA can appoint to schools causing

concern are a strength of the service. The LEA has supported 24 governors in taking award-bearing training courses in readiness for this role.

117. Minority ethnic groups are under-represented on governing bodies. A survey has been carried out, results have been analysed and a baseline has been established from which to track future progress. However, a wide range of co-ordinated activities to address this issue has yet to take place.

118. Governors receive financial information and performance data, together with training in its use. Useful, regular meetings are held for link governors, which have led to the development of a governors' website, changes to the training programme and the provision of resources in each school. A telephone helpline provides helpful and accessible support to individual governors.

119. Support for self-evaluation by governing bodies to help them bring about change and improve their working practices is recognised by the LEA as an area for development, but is at an early stage. Sound training and support programmes have been provided to governors of schools causing concern. The development of further systems to enable the LEA to identify quickly weak governance in schools and provide support to improve it remains a priority.

120. While headteachers receive written notes of visits to school from the LEA's officers, these are not copied to the chair of governors. This limits their use in supporting the strategic role of the governing body.

Recommendation

In order to support the strategic role of the governing body:

- copy significant notes to the chair of governors following visits of school improvement officers, consultants, and other senior LEA officers.

121. The LEA has established systems to consult with governors on the development of policies and to share information, but consultation periods are protracted and governors are burdened with too much paperwork.

Recommendations

In order to support school governors in making effective contributions to policy and service development:

- work to improve the effectiveness of consultancy procedures; and
- identify ways in which electronic communication can be employed to improve consultation and information sharing.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

122. This area was not previously inspected. The council's approach to securing suitable management support services is satisfactory overall.

123. The traded services booklet is well presented, detailing traded services available to schools from all departments within the council. Services are offered on an annual basis, with flexible options in most cases. Information is sent out in November each year, giving schools plenty of time to make informed choices. However, allowing all schools to sign up as late as 31 March is an unnecessary barrier to service planning. Information on core services provided to schools from centrally retained budgets is not made available, apart from elements of the statutory financial service.

124. Evaluation of the quality of service delivery is not in place, and too much reliance is placed on high levels of buy-back, which is around 85% overall, as an indicator of satisfactory service performance. However, the traded services booklet does include a feedback form for schools to complete. Barnet offers schools additional 'turnkey' packages, which are options to buy a group of services at a discounted price. These options are confusing and the reasons why certain services are grouped together may have made sense in the past, but are no longer relevant. Notice periods to terminate services are appropriate and invoicing arrangements have been improved recently. Schools are provided with details of alternative providers.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of management support services:

- establish evaluation procedures for all traded services and clarify the benefits of the LEA's combined packages to schools.

125. No fieldwork was conducted during this inspection. The **education finance service** was previously highly satisfactory. It is now satisfactory.

126. The LEA's support for **human resources** was good at the time of the previous inspection. Specific elements of the service have deteriorated, and the overall support is now highly satisfactory.

127. The major weakness is the payroll service, which does not provide the customer focused service required by schools. Plans are in hand to change significantly the service delivery. Work has started to look at alternative external providers and staff have recently received customer care training. The current service received and paid for by schools, however, remains inconsistent and is insufficiently responsive.

128. Schools rate personnel support as satisfactory, but there is some variability in the quality of work of individual team members. Good support has been provided to schools in redundancy, capability and grievance cases. Good progress has also been made on implementing single status and monthly pay agreements in schools. Effective absence monitoring procedures are in place, and good information is available to assist headteachers and managers in targeting high levels of absence. Senior officers are looking for new ways to

improve the personnel service further, for example by piloting a new on-line and streamlined recruitment service.

129. **The ICT strategy, infrastructure and support for administration** were satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection but are now unsatisfactory. Work to address the recommendations from the previous inspection report has been too slow and is incomplete. Schools remain dissatisfied with ICT support, and the LEA has failed to establish a common understanding with all schools about the strategic role of ICT in supporting school improvement. An ICT strategy document was produced in July 2003.

Recommendation

In order to improve the use of ICT:

- revise the ICT strategy regularly to reflect the pace of development and changing aspirations.

130. The LEA has acted speedily to address the recommendation in the previous inspection report to make the criteria for allocating ICT funds clearer. However, details of the LEA's funding formula remain vague, and schools are sometimes asked to make decisions about the retention of funds without knowing the full effect that these may have on their allocation.

Recommendation

In order for all schools to make sound decisions about the retention of any element of ICT grant funding:

- explain clearly the amount of funding each school is entitled to receive, the amount the LEA wishes to retain from schools' allocation, and what it intends to use it for.

131. School administrative support is generally satisfactory, with high levels of buy-back. Effective support was provided to assist schools with the Pupil Level Annual School Census returns during January 2003 and attendance monitoring packages. Electronic communication between schools and the LEA was rated poor or very poor by 60% of primary and 50% of secondary respondents in the school survey. There is still a lack of confidence in the LEA's recommended e-mail system, and some schools are using other systems. Plans are in place, however, to implement much-needed new LEA databases and management information systems, although these will not be fully operational for another year.

132. **Property Services** were unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, and remain so. Although there is a high buy-back of services provided by the LEA, the school survey showed that 60% of primary and 57% of secondary respondents rated the quality of the building maintenance service as poor or very poor. The LEA service is not customer-focused and does not have evaluation procedures in place to collect robust data to judge satisfaction levels, or to target required improvements in service delivery. The service, as a whole, has not yet adapted to meet the challenge of dealing with schools as customers with individual needs.

133. **Catering and cleaning** services were not previously inspected. Catering is satisfactory, and cleaning is poor. The poor quality, loss-making corporate cleaning contract has, inappropriately, been extended over the last 16 months, partly to give the council time to investigate a facilities management package covering both catering and cleaning services. The LEA has now taken decisive action to tender for a new cleaning contract to commence in January 2004, and not to allow the in-house service to submit a tender.

134. The in-house catering provider operates the corporate contract, which has also been extended until a new tender is put in place from January 2004. Schools value the in-house client catering support team. Sound advice is provided to schools wishing to opt out of the corporate contract.

135. **Grounds maintenance** was previously satisfactory. It remains so. Services that are provided by the in-house direct service organisation to approximately a quarter of schools generally meet their needs.

The LEA's work in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

136. This is a new inspection area. The support to schools is highly satisfactory.

137. The recruitment and retention of teachers are identified clearly as priorities in the EDP. A range of suitable strategies has been successfully employed to address teacher shortages, including the appointment of a recruitment and retention strategy manager.

138. Recruitment campaigns conducted overseas, along with the borough's graduate teacher programme and the recruitment of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), have successfully addressed recruitment problems. At the time of the inspection, teaching vacancies were in line with the national average and no classes were without teachers. The introduction of an electronic database to act as a 'clearing house' for NQT applications benefited schools and new teachers. Arrangements for NQT induction are effective, and the LEA provides a central programme to complement that of the schools.

139. Strategies to increase representation of teachers from minority ethnic groups in teaching and management are at an early stage of development. Overall, minority ethnic groups are under-represented in the teaching force in Barnet. Measures to implement government plans for reforms to the workforce are also very new.

140. The recruitment of headteachers is effective and currently there are no vacancies. The LEA is represented on all appointment panels. Over the last two years, a quarter of secondary schools have had new headteachers. However, the rate of turnover in primary headships is more closely in line with the national average.

141. The LEA has taken positive action to improve the retention of teachers. Around a third of teachers in Barnet have less than three years' experience, and the LEA has identified the high cost of local housing as a significant factor in their decisions to leave the authority. To tackle this, the education service has worked successfully with the housing department to support teachers in finding accommodation. Effective use has been made of national grants and 75 teachers have been helped to purchase homes through the loan scheme.

142. Prior to the recent restructuring, the quality of the LEA's training for teachers was too variable, with most insufficiently aligned to the LEA's priorities and with quality assurance procedures that were inconsistent. New arrangements, linked more specifically to the EDP priorities, are now in place, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new approach to the continuing professional development of teachers. The LEA is effectively promoting national training programmes. Approximately half of the eligible teachers are taking the national professional qualification for headship. Partnership with higher education providers is good and, through local arrangements, large numbers of teaching assistants have been supported in obtaining specialist accredited qualifications.

Section 3: Special educational needs

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

143. The LEA has been too slow in responding to the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. During that inspection the LEA was undergoing a restructuring of its provision for SEN. It was doing so again at the time of this inspection. The uncertainty and frustration identified by some schools and parents at the time of the previous inspection remain. The LEA's draft strategy for SEN has some significant weaknesses that need to be addressed fully before the necessary improvements in overall provision can be made. Some positive developments are beginning to happen, but more needs to be done to reduce the high number of pupils with SEN currently placed out of borough.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

144. This aspect was previously unsatisfactory. It is now poor.

145. The previous inspection report noted that the LEA was aware of weaknesses with its SEN strategy and had instigated a review to clarify the policy and bring about a more efficient distribution of resources. A recommendation was made to communicate the outcomes of the review to stakeholders and urgently implement its priorities. The LEA has been too slow in responding to this recommendation and overall progress in implementing a new policy since the previous inspection is poor. Those schools interviewed as part of this inspection expressed concerns about constant re-organisation.

146. The policy that is currently out for consultation does not adequately state what the effects will be in the local context. Although this paper gives the total number of statements in each category of need, these are not broken down by age so that participants in the consultation process can track the long-term patterns with any implications for provision. There is also limited use of data to help model the range and type of future provision that is needed. It is not yet sufficiently clear which moderate learning difficulties pupils could have their needs met in mainstream schools, and how this will impact on schools in terms of specialism. Without these details, which include detailed costs of transport and support locally, future financial planning for SEN will be too imprecise.

Recommendations

In order to improve the LEA's strategy for special educational needs:

- ensure greater clarity and coherence in the planned provision for all pupils with a statement of special educational need; and
- reduce out-of-borough placements.

147. Some important work has taken place since the previous inspection, most notably in relation to an external consultant's review of SEN, a follow-up action plan and an approved

2002 policy 'principles of inclusion: special educational needs'. The action plan has resulted in a number of improvements in the provision for SEN over the last 12 months. Action taken to build prior attainment criteria into the funding formula for pupils with SEN at school action and school action plus levels has resulted in a better match of funding to pupils' needs and better access to a broader curriculum for pupils with SEN. The decision to hand over delegation of funding for two hearing impairment resource bases has also been a success, with pupils in these bases making good progress. However, although this consultation policy paper outlines various options, it has yet to be ratified and fully costed, and there is insufficient detail to judge its likely effectiveness in addressing the key SEN issues that remain in the LEA. These relate, in particular, to the high numbers and costs of out-of-borough placement of pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and those with speech and language and complex needs.

148. The LEA has developed a suitably broad range of approaches for consultation with schools and parents over proposed developments for SEN. An SEN strategy group comprising headteachers, parent representatives, voluntary organisations and a wide range of statutory agencies was set up in September 2002. However, much more work is needed to convince all stakeholders that the LEA's support for SEN is appropriate to meet fully the needs of pupils and schools. The pre-inspection school survey showed that both primary and secondary schools rated almost all aspects of the LEA support for SEN less than satisfactory and significantly worse than other LEAs surveyed. Interviews with some teachers and parents during the inspection generally supported this view.

Statutory obligations

149. This area is satisfactory. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities for SEN. Around three-quarters of statements are completed within the expected 18-week period. This is a very significant improvement since the previous inspection. The LEA has effective systems for identifying and assessing pupils with SEN. Schools have recently been provided with criteria for determining a referral for statutory assessment. This clear and fair process for referrals has resulted in a very significant drop in the number of requests to initiate statements, in line with the LEA's agreed principles for inclusion. Between April 2003 and September 2003, the number of statements fell from 1,701 to 1,530.

150. The quality of statements is generally satisfactory, but there are some weaknesses. Recent statements give clear guidance to schools about supporting the needs of their pupils. Communication between schools and the LEA following the amendments made to a statement at the annual review is occasionally unsatisfactory. Representation by the LEA at annual reviews is satisfactory, and has improved since the previous inspection. Transition plans are reasonably well managed. However, parents are not sufficiently involved in the development of their children's individual education plans, and schools have not had enough training to support them on this.

151. Parents consider that their concerns are now being heard effectively through the parent partnership. It is too early, however, to evaluate the effectiveness of the newly appointed parent partnership officer. Officers clearly recognise the need to maintain impartiality in the role of conciliation. Procedures for tribunals are satisfactory.

School improvement

152. The LEA's support for school improvement is unsatisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, it was also unsatisfactory. Although service level agreements are in place, there is a lack of robust performance management systems within the educational psychology service and specialist support teams. This has resulted in inconsistencies in practice across the schools. Systems for monitoring the progress of individual pupils for whom a statement has been made have not been effective. Following a recent restructuring, there is evidence of capacity for future improvement. An electronic system has been established to track the progress made by pupils with statements, but this system is so new that it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness.

153. The support for SEN co-ordinators is inconsistent. The advisory teachers for autism have provided very good training for SEN co-ordinators, and the quality of hearing impaired support has been good. However, schools have too often found it difficult to obtain quality support to help them manage pupils with challenging behaviour. Support for pupils with learning difficulties has, on occasions, also been poor. Inconsistencies in the quality of provision within the support services remain. There is a note of optimism within those schools interviewed during this inspection that, under new management, the quality of support for schools from these services is likely to improve. Strategic links with health and social services are improving. Pooled funding arrangements between health and education have resulted in improved speech therapy across the borough's secondary schools. Gaining access to occupational therapy, however, remains a problem for parents and schools. The child and adolescent mental health services are improving.

Recommendations

In order to improve SEN functions to support school improvement:

- develop a more robust performance management system for all specialist support services; and
- ensure that the system to monitor the progress of pupils for whom a statement of special educational need has been made is both rigorous and effective.

Value for money

154. Support for SEN provides satisfactory value for money. However, the LEA's poor strategy for SEN and the unsatisfactory functions to support school improvement are key weaknesses, although some improvements are being made. Overall, pupils with statements make at least satisfactory, and often good, progress as a result of the provision made for them. A pattern of overspending has been turned round to a budget under control. The LEA is now making savings on its allocated budget for transport, and is now poised to invest in improvements in the provision it makes for SEN. The deployment of funding is clear and in line with pupils' needs. The overall budget for SEN is above average and there has been a shift toward delegating more money into schools' budgets. Delegation of funding is higher than that found in similar LEAs and nationally. The systems to evaluate the use of delegated funding are still new, but there is evidence to indicate that pupils on SEN registers who do not have a statement of special educational need make at least satisfactory progress.

Although expenditure on placements outside the LEA is higher than that of statistical neighbours, the LEA has recognised the need to reduce these, and in 2002/2003 14 pupils were successfully brought back to Barnet schools.

Section 4: Promoting social inclusion

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

155. With the exception of combating racism, which is unsatisfactory, support for vulnerable pupils is at least satisfactory or better. However, the corporate response to the government's policies on social inclusion has been too slow. The council has a clear equal opportunities policy, and the principles of inclusion have been accepted by councillors. Although within the draft corporate community plan there is a laudable statement of intent to promote social inclusion for isolated, disaffected and disadvantaged groups living in the borough, action plans do not show how this is to be achieved.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

156. The LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion is satisfactory, but there are weaknesses. A number of initiatives, such as Sure Start and the child and adolescent mental health service team, are at too early a stage of development to evaluate their effectiveness in improving provision. A cross-directorate approach to social inclusion is developing well. Provision for inclusion through the services of the LEA and across the work of the other directorates is mostly at an early stage of development.

157. The principles of inclusion are at the heart of the draft policy for SEN. However, this is still being consulted upon and, as yet, there are no robust, timed and costed action plans. Behaviour support has recently been restructured, but the impact of the new management and the quality of the service cannot yet be fully evaluated. Liaison with social services and health is good at a strategic level, but is more variable at school level.

158. There are some effective partnership initiatives, such as with the voluntary organisation working with children with physical disabilities. The director of the inclusion and play opportunities project considers that the LEA's senior officers are consulting well, and the quality of provision for physically disabled children within the borough is improving as a result. There is an effective partnership relationship with the further education college to provide places for recently enrolled asylum seeking children when there is not a place at a local school.

159. Additional funding is enthusiastically and successfully sought. The Single Regeneration Bid Challenge Fund has been used very well to develop sports facilities and estate-based youth work at Graham Park. The LEA has just developed an electronic identification, referral and tracking system for collecting and analysing data about the progress made by vulnerable groups of children in its schools but, because it is at such an early stage of development, it does not yet sufficiently inform strategic planning. Officers gather data to monitor the attainment and progress of identified groups, such as looked after children and those excluded from school, but there are important omissions. The LEA does not have the information on how many children were placed out of borough following the closure of the emotional, behavioural and social difficulties provision. Officers do not know how many children with English as an additional language are on the SEN register across their schools, and so cannot know, with certainty, whether or not they are receiving the right support.

The supply of school places

160. At the time of the previous inspection, the planning of school places was highly satisfactory. It continues to be so. The LEA does well on published school place planning performance indicators. Demand for school places in Barnet is high, and sound action has been taken to expand popular schools. Plans are under way to address specific areas of both surplus capacity and overcrowded schools. Current plans are rightly being reviewed as a result of the effects on individual schools of changes to the way school capacity is calculated nationally.

161. The school organisation plan is a comprehensive document that contains a useful summary of the LEA's priorities for future action, with satisfactory links to school improvement issues. The school organisation committee operates independently of the LEA and challenging debate takes place on proposals presented by the LEA. Appropriate consultation, following statutory procedures, has taken place with stakeholders on the recent school closures and the expansion of popular secondary schools. Forecasting pupil numbers is accurate, and the models used are regularly evaluated. Good, frequent communication takes place with neighbouring LEAs.

Asset management

162. This area was not previously inspected. Asset management planning is satisfactory overall. School building projects are prioritised satisfactorily and account for the majority of the council's capital programme. However, the lack of capital resources to improve school buildings, coupled with years of under-investment in building maintenance, has contributed to the significant backlog of repairs, currently totalling £68 million. The LEA estimates that 34 schools need replacing over the next ten years, at a cost of over £216 million. A recent £90 million Private Finance Initiative bid to replace 23 primary schools was not approved by the DfES. Other active work is under way to identify alternative funding, including receipts from the disposal of surplus premises or land, regeneration projects planned within Barnet, and potential individual public/private partnership agreements.

163. The transparency of information and of the principles for making funding allocations to schools has improved since the previous inspection. Documentation clearly details how work will be prioritised when funding becomes available. The weakness is the way in which information is communicated to all schools. An asset management headteachers' group works effectively to challenge officers and develop planning to take account of school improvement issues. Where bids have been invited from schools to prioritise limited funding based on school improvement criteria, successful bids have been shared with other schools to help inform future bidding opportunities.

Admissions

164. This area was not subject to any detailed fieldwork. At the time of the previous inspection, this was highly satisfactory. It remains so.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

165. Provision for pupils who have no school place is highly satisfactory. It has improved from the time of the previous inspection when it was satisfactory. The LEA meets its statutory responsibilities. Liaison with other agencies is good and there is productive joint working with the health service in particular. However, planning documents do not provide a satisfactory platform for rigorous scrutiny, monitoring of progress and evaluation of effectiveness.

166. Close checks are kept on pupils needing places. Provision is decided promptly by a multi-agency panel and starts with minimal delay in most cases. Pupils with statements of SEN are not now being placed in the PRUs. This is a positive step. Arrangements are made, at an early stage, to facilitate the reintegration of pupils from the PRU into mainstream schools, although the numbers doing so are limited. Schoolgirl mothers are successfully supported in continuing to attend school. Pupils' attendance and progress are closely monitored. Pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 in the PRU has improved significantly and all leavers in 2003 went on to further education. Satisfactory guidance is provided to parents choosing to educate their children otherwise than at school and the suitability of provision is closely monitored.

Attendance

167. Support for attendance is highly satisfactory. It has improved since the previous inspection when it was satisfactory. Attendance in secondary schools has improved marginally since the previous inspection, with unauthorised absence remaining constant. Attendance in primary schools is unchanged. Authorised absence has declined marginally, while unauthorised absence has increased. These figures suggest that the LEA has made progress in addressing some attendance problems, but not those of the minority of pupils with significant absenteeism. There is effective joint working with other agencies, particularly the police and the health service. Extensive use is made of court action and truancy sweeps.

168. The LEA's education welfare team (EWT) provides good support for schools, according to their needs. The EWT's main strength in the secondary phase is the deployment of education welfare officers (EWOs) within schools. These link well with schools and are highly regarded. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and education welfare officers work in a very flexible way to contribute to the overall programme of action to improve attendance and reduce unauthorised absence. The challenge and support for whole school policies and practices are better than for behaviour. However, benchmarking data have yet to be provided for schools. Support for primary schools has been increased during the current year, on the recognition by the LEA that, while good work had been done, this area of activity had been under-resourced. Weaknesses in planning documentation are compensated for by regular and effective communication between EWOs and schools, within the EWT, and between the EWT and other agencies.

Behaviour support

169. Support for behaviour is satisfactory. It was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection.

170. The LEA has good awareness of the weaknesses in its provision, and has taken a number of steps to address them. New, and in some cases, expanded provision is to be established and there has been effective liaison with other agencies in both planning and funding this provision. New liaison structures are well designed. Much remains to be done, however, to win credibility in schools for the LEA's challenge and support roles. Benchmarking data are not yet provided to schools. Planning documentation shares the same weaknesses of that for pupils who have no school place.

171. The number of permanent exclusions from primary and secondary schools has generally remained in line with national and similar LEA's averages since the previous inspection. The trend in terms of fixed-term exclusions is not clear because the LEA did not collect data until 2002/2003. However, there are indications that the use of such exclusions is high.

172. The most effective changes to provision since the previous inspection have been the establishment of learning support units in a number of secondary schools and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of learning mentors. Peripatetic support for secondary schools has been largely ineffective. The quality of such work in primary schools has been better, but limited in scale. Provision for both phases has recently been substantially restructured. It is too early to assess the impact of the replacement services. Pupils have very few opportunities to attend off-site provision as part of a programme to address their behaviour problems. There is now no provision for full-time attendance off site, except at the PRU, and provision there is made only after permanent exclusion.

173. Support and challenge for schools in managing behaviour as a whole school issue have generally been very limited, although some effective work has recently taken place in a few schools with very high exclusion rates. Little change has been seen in the over-representation of certain minority ethnic groups within the exclusion figures. The LEA has provided satisfactory support for the introduction of pastoral support programmes in schools but does not attend even the initial meetings in all cases. There is some indication that the programmes have had a positive effect on reducing permanent exclusions. Support for schools in developing alternative curricular opportunities at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

174. The procedures for health, safety, welfare and child protection were previously highly satisfactory. They are now good, and provide good value for money. Recruitment procedures for all staff who work with children are very good. There is an effective and well developed strategy based on a thorough needs analysis. Structures are already in place to meet the proposed changes outlined in the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters'. The quality of training for schools is of a high standard, and enables governors to meet their statutory requirements with confidence.

175. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure that both the LEA and schools comply with statutory requirements. The documentation provided by the LEA on health and safety matters for schools is comprehensive and clear. Schools are alerted to new legislation in good time to develop policies and ensure their effective implementation. There is good guidance for schools on how to write risk assessments. Borough health and safety officers

conduct regular risk assessments in schools, and issues that emerge are reported back to the LEA. The LEA supports the schools in addressing these issues.

176. The LEA is active in tackling drug-related issues. There is an effective drug and alcohol advisory team to support schools. A protocol has been established for inter-agency working and very effective work is carried out to identify and support young people within the borough who are at risk of drug misuse.

177. Child protection is good. The proportion of children on the child protection register is in line with the national average. There has been a very recent review of the area child protection committee (ACPC) by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Following this review, the borough is working hard to ensure wider community representation on the ACPC. Child protection is a priority across all agencies and the joint consultancy team is effective. Its clear brief ensures that an immediate response is made to education specific recommendations from the ACPC. Procedures for reporting and tracking missing children are effective. Very good protocols have been established to track children at risk who move out of and into the borough.

178. The strategic partnership between social services and education is very good, and has resulted in the very successful implementation of protocols for all staff employed in schools. These protocols have been adopted across the borough for all adults who come into contact with children. The multi-agency approach to training teachers, learning support assistants and child minders is very good. Officers have recognised the need for training school governors and a programme is about to be launched. All schools have a designated child protection co-ordinator. The LEA does not know exactly how many of its schools have a designated governor for child protection, but this issue has been recognised as an area for development. The training programme is rigorously monitored for quality and attendance, and the CEO takes direct and personal action should any school not be represented at the training. Training is updated to meet needs and delivered regularly. The current roll-out of training focuses on developing the skills of classroom assistants and learning support assistants, and explains the reorganisation of the child protection teams within the Metropolitan Police Force. The LEA, in partnership with social services, is developing its benchmarking procedures.

Looked after children

179. At the time of the previous inspection this area was highly satisfactory. It remains so. Councillors continue to fulfil the role of corporate parents well, by ensuring that the provision for looked after children is monitored regularly, and that decisive action is taken when needed. In addition, there are effective links between education and social services to overview the provision.

180. Challenging targets have been set for looked after children within the local public service agreement. A working party, with representatives from schools, social services and education, has developed a clear strategy for raising the attainment and attendance of looked after children. This emphasises support at key points in each child's school career, for example during examinations. In addition, a range of relevant initiatives is being developed to improve provision. These include daily monitoring of attendance and provision of study

support materials, ICT equipment, and a homework study centre. The central monitoring of attendance is a recent development and it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

181. At the time of the previous inspection, the absence of attainment data in pupil records was criticised. There is now a robust data collection system. Attainment data are recorded in the personal education plans of all looked after children. This allows progress to be monitored and support to be targeted effectively. Analysis of performance data shows that, apart from Key Stage 3, attainment is above that of looked after children in similar LEAs and nationally. The LEA has responded to this by employing an additional teacher to target Key Stage 3.

182. A team of advisory teachers and social workers provides effective support to individual pupils and advice to schools to assist them in developing strategies to raise the attainment and attendance of looked after children. In addition, relevant joint training has been provided for carers, social workers and designated teachers to develop a more consistent approach to meeting every child's needs.

183. The number of placements of children outside the borough is high. The distance from the LEA to these schools limits the development of closer working relationships between the specialist support team and designated teachers in schools. This is being addressed actively by a range of imaginative initiatives to increase the number of foster placements within the borough.

Measures to combat racism

184. At the time of the previous inspection, the provision for combating racism was highly satisfactory. The LEA remains committed to tackling racism in all its forms. It has developed good policies and guidance since the previous inspection. However, the rigour and consistency with which policies are implemented and monitored have deteriorated since the previous inspection. Provision in this area is now unsatisfactory.

185. Despite the efforts made by the LEA, it has not succeeded in engaging all schools in its drive against racism. Although the LEA requires schools to make termly returns on recorded racist incidents, the number of schools adhering to this requirement has declined significantly, and last spring fewer than half made returns. The LEA is attempting to address this issue through a range of strategies, including: training; support for targeted schools; and reminder letters. However, since there has been no analysis of the reasons for the lack of returns, the LEA has no secure means of knowing that these strategies are appropriate or likely to be effective. The percentage of black students permanently excluded from schools rose significantly in 2002/2003 and is higher than the national average. The monitoring of the race equality policy has declined since the previous inspection.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategies against racism:

- ensure that termly reports on racist incidents are collected from schools and action taken; and

-
- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure that monitoring of the implementation of race equality policies within schools is completed. |
|---|

186. The council took decisive action in response to the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. It conducted a detailed audit of current practice in relation to racial equality, revised its race equality policy and produced an action plan with clear targets and timescales for its implementation and monitoring. It has also set up an equalities team, which has provided effective support to schools in conducting self reviews, in developing their curricula and in providing focused training for staff. This team has also worked successfully with other teams and agencies in organising a varied range of LEA initiatives, including a 'black history' month, an African dance and music project, a holocaust day and a refugee week, in order to develop greater mutual understanding and co-operation between ethnic groups. The success of these and allied developments is reflected in the award of Beacon status for community cohesion.

187. In order to recruit a workforce that reflects the ethnic composition of the borough, the LEA has developed a number of imaginative strategies. These include a scheme to encourage refugees with graduate qualifications to seek graduate teacher status and the establishment of support networks for Black staff and student teachers. However, these initiatives are at an early stage of implementation and have not yet significantly addressed the racial imbalance of the workforce.

Section 5: Corporate issues

Introduction to corporate issues

188. At the time of the previous inspection, most corporate areas were at least satisfactory and some were good. It is now generally satisfactory overall, with the exception of the clarity and consistency of corporate plans, which are unsatisfactory. There have, however, been significant changes since that time. There is now a new political administration, a number of new education staff have been appointed, officers' roles have been redefined, and new structures and systems within the corporate centre and in the education service, in particular, have been implemented. Many of these changes are so new that evaluation of all of them has not been possible during this inspection. In many areas, the stated intentions about effective change are not always supported sufficiently clearly by evidence that these changes have made a difference to the provision for education.

Corporate planning

189. Corporate planning for education was previously highly satisfactory. However, the clarity and coherence of some elements of corporate plans for education are now unsatisfactory.

190. Since the previous inspection, a new director for education and children and a new CEO have been appointed. Also during this time, an independent company was commissioned by the authority to evaluate the overall progress of the LEA and its capacity to implement change. This led the authority to appoint, for a six month period, an interim specialist education consultancy group, with an acting CEO, to take responsibility for education within the borough. A detailed re-structuring of the service was proposed and implemented shortly after the appointment by the council of the permanent CEO in February 2003. Throughout this time, the major corporate plans were re-written to be aligned more accurately to developments at corporate and education service levels.

191. There are two major plans for education: the corporate plan and the education service performance management plan (PMP). The corporate plan has an accompanying Best Value Performance Plan, which includes details of performance indicators across all services of the council, including education. The education service PMP cross-references the five priorities in the corporate plan, in addition to identifying five priorities based on improving outcomes for children and young people. There is inconsistency between the education targets in the Best Value Performance Plan and those in the education service PMP. This is acknowledged by senior officers. The targets that are used in the education service PMP do, however, mainly reflect those found in the EDP, although differences still exist. Not all areas identified in the PMP have sufficiently clear targets by which the LEA can accurately measure its own rate of progress, or show stakeholders, including schools and elected members, that progress is appropriate to the actions taken. The language used to describe a number of target areas is often vague and ambiguous, with insufficient clarity between these and the key tasks identified in the plan.

Recommendations**In order to improve the clarity and coherence of the educational elements of corporate plans, the LEA should:**

- align the education targets in all major plans; and
- specify outcome targets and clarify evaluative language in the education service performance management plan as an aid to measuring the rate of progress more accurately over the life of the plan.

192. There is a satisfactory system in place to monitor the implementation of education priorities within the corporate plan. The process, quite rightly, places accountability on senior education officers and the lead member for education and children. In addition, there are bi-monthly 'challenge meetings', whereby the lead member and the CEO meet with two elected members and a finance officer to discuss the progress of education against its stated targets. The basis for these meetings is a 'firststats' document, which is a prepared paper on specific aspects of service provision. These meetings are so new that it is not yet possible to judge the extent to which this process is an effective tool for monitoring progress and bringing about action that will help to improve the educational provision.

193. A number of team plans have been written to underpin the education service PMP, but there is a wide variation in standard and content. Too many of the plans focus on tasks to be completed by officers, rather than on required outcomes to improve services.

Decision-making

194. Decision-making was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It remains so. Since the previous inspection, there has been a change in the political administration of the council. The council operates satisfactorily at both cabinet and scrutiny levels. The education and children overview scrutiny committee covers a range of suitable education-related matters. It has set itself clear agendas for the current academic year, including the continuation of a recently introduced initiative that includes receipt of Ofsted school inspection reports, and direct meetings with the headteacher and chair of the governing body from these schools. This initiative has, so far, been well received by schools. However, although the work of this scrutiny committee has been conducted in a business-like manner, the procedures for holding the executive to account for education policy decisions have yet to be used fully.

195. The speed of financial decision-making is satisfactory. The processes for consultation are generally effective, and allow the LEA to target its resources to priorities in a suitable timescale. Elected members have shown an ability to make difficult decisions. For example, recent problems with schools' budgets were dealt with satisfactorily in an open and transparent way.

The leadership provided by officers and elected members

196. The quality of leadership of officers was previously satisfactory, and that of elected members good. They are now both satisfactory.

197. Elected members recognise the importance of education, and the efforts of the current administration have been focused specifically on supporting this in both financial and practical ways. The council has continued to pass on to schools close to or the full education SSA. It has also given priority to education spending, at the expense of other central services.

198. The leadership provided by senior officers has been subject to considerable change since the previous inspection. The pre-inspection school survey showed that schools rated the effectiveness of the leadership provided by senior officers in the bottom 25% of LEAs surveyed. However, there is now a sense of cautious optimism from the majority of headteachers who met with the inspection team. Regular consultative meetings between officers and headteachers are helping to develop a greater understanding of shared priorities. Senior officers recognise some of the shortcomings of service provision, and are working hard, albeit belatedly since the previous inspection, to address some of these.

199. The quality of advice, including information provided by officers for elected members, was previously good. It is now satisfactory. Elected members praise the work of officers, and evidence is seen in the voluminous annexes that often accompany the agendas for the elected member meetings that focus on education matters. The level of detail provided is, however, occasionally disproportionate to the time allocated for the meeting as a whole. This creates, therefore, the potential for some important issues to be given insufficient time for discussion and, in the case of the education and children overview scrutiny committee, a lack of opportunity to challenge some important policy decisions of the cabinet or check rigorously progress reports from the education service.

Recommendations

In order to improve decision-making, discussion and scrutiny of education-related matters, elected members should ensure that:

- the education and children overview scrutiny committee should hold to account more explicitly the education policy decision-making of the cabinet; and
- ensure adequate time is provided in meetings to discuss fully all education matters.

Partnership

200. The LEA's partnership links at the time of the previous inspection were satisfactory. They are now highly satisfactory in almost all areas.

201. The school survey showed that, in almost all partnership areas, the LEA was rated significantly lower than most other LEAs inspected in the current year. There is currently no

follow-up survey that provides counter-evidence to these findings. Discussions with a significant number of headteachers during the inspection indicate that partnership links with schools, especially at secondary level, are beginning to change for the better. The consultative headteacher groups, some of which have originated since the arrival of the director for education and children, are suitably planned into the calendar of meetings between senior officers and schools. These provide important forums for developing an exchange of views between officers and headteachers, and the early indications are that more open and robust dialogue is beginning to emerge.

202. Links with the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education are strong, with a continued high level of support for schools.

203. Consultation with local unions is good. The quality of support provided by the LEA's specialist officers has been very good, particularly during the recent restructuring of the education service.

204. The LEA's links with the health service are satisfactory, and are improving. Pooled funding arrangements have helped to improve the quality of some, but not all, support services. Links with the police have some strong features. The police have been actively involved in some joint work with the LEA, especially in attendance sweeps, which have contributed to the improved attendance in some schools.

205. Strong links have been maintained between the LEA and the local further education college since the previous inspection. Recent developments in specialist accommodation on the site of the college are the result of this partnership. The local strategic partnership also maintains effective links with the LEA. There are planned meetings, and recognition from the officers of the importance of the partnership in supporting the work of some local schools. Clear links have also been established with a local university, with which the LEA is engaged in accredited professional development courses and a graduate teacher programme.

Support for early years

206. This is a new inspection area. The LEA's support for early years is satisfactory.

207. Improving the provision and quality of the early years curriculum is clearly stated as an aim within corporate and education service strategic planning. This commitment is followed through in a practical way. An elected member chairs the early years development and childcare partnership, and collaborative working between all LEA staff involved in developing early years provision and the partnership board is well-established. Partners are appropriately representative of the community, statutory, and voluntary services, and are also involved on the executive board and in sub-committees.

208. Targets in the early years childcare plan focus well on meeting local needs, particularly in the provision of secure play opportunities and care outside school hours. Funding streams and actions with Sure Start and the neighbourhood nursery initiative have been aligned sensibly to meet the needs of children in the most deprived areas of the borough. Activities to enhance provision for children under five and to develop a children's centre are also under way.

209. Since the previous inspection, a large early years and play service, drawn from previously separate services, has been formed. Several staff work on projects commissioned by the partnership, and the work of the remaining service is focused on improving the quality of teaching and in raising standards.

210. Recent work has, quite rightly, given priority to training for all providers to develop their understanding of the Foundation Stage and assessment using the national profile. The LEA achieved its initial target of delivering training to all providers, but doing so led to some slippage in other EDP early years activities. For example, work to develop guidance material to support settings in working with vulnerable pupils has not taken place. Links to the literacy and numeracy teams at Key Stage 1 are emerging. Planned termly cluster meetings provide a suitable network for disseminating advice and guidance. Provision of information and training for parents is also developing well.

211. The gathering of benchmarking data is not yet complete, and monitoring is at an early stage. This does not, as yet, give a sufficiently robust base from which to plan and give priority to a suitable range of activities.

Recommendation

In order to inform strategic planning of early years work:

- establish robust systems of data collection and evaluation to underpin activity planning.

212. Plans are suitably advanced to establish fully a team of area SEN co-ordinators, from January 2004, to provide advice and support to early years settings who work with children with SEN. A regular rolling programme of initial training for maintained and non-maintained providers is already under way.

Support for 14-19 education

213. This is a new inspection area. The LEA's support for 14–19 education is satisfactory.

214. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has maintained a satisfactory level of involvement in Key Stage 4 and post-16 activities. The LEA has sensibly audited the 14-19 provision in the borough's schools. Key priorities have been identified as a result of this audit, and are well referenced in the revised EDP. The priority activities satisfactorily link Key Stage 4 and post-16 to the broader 14-19 provision. The major thrust is to develop a strategy for post-16 vocational courses. The targets for development are realistic and achievable within the life of the plan. An external consultant and a secondary inspector have been appointed to take the agenda forward, and publish, by December 2003, a more detailed 14–19 development plan.

215. The LEA has effective links with local partners, especially the Learning and Skills Council, the Connexions service, Barnet College and Barnet Trident. This partnership group is working to establish a clear strategy for the vocational pathway to ensure continuity from Key Stage 4 to the post-16 phase. There is a clear strategy for the additional work-related

learning and alternative provision at Key Stage 4, but the route for continuity between Key Stage 4 and post-16 is not yet sufficiently clear.

216. Although elected members currently monitor individual schools' provision for the 14-19 curriculum, through the receipt and discussion of individual Ofsted school inspection reports, the process is too new to judge its effectiveness in influencing strategic decision-making for 14 -19 education.

Appendix 1: Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency.

In order to regularise procedures for all schools identified as causing concern:

- set in place agreements negotiated with each school that identify the key issues, specific support to address them, timescales to review progress, and clear outcomes that are to be achieved.

In order to promote rigour in monitoring procedures:

- establish systems to ensure that information from all agencies providing support is used to inform decision-making about schools' progress; and
- identify clearly in reports: where progress has not been secured; the remedial action to be taken; and the timetable for its implementation.

In order to improve decision-making, discussion and scrutiny of education-related matters, elected members should ensure that:

- the education and children overview scrutiny committee should hold to account more explicitly the education policy decision-making of the cabinet; and
- ensure adequate time is provided in meetings to discuss fully all education matters.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement.

In order to improve the clarity and coherence of the educational elements of corporate plans, the LEA should:

- align the education targets in all major plans; and
- specify outcome targets and clarify evaluative language in the education service performance management plan as an aid to measuring the rate of progress more accurately over the life of the plan.

In order to develop consistent and timely provision of data:

- establish, in consultation with schools, an annual programme for distributing and exchanging data.

In order to improve the LEA's strategy for special educational needs:

- ensure greater clarity and coherence in the planned provision for all pupils
-

with a statement of special educational need; and

- reduce out-of-borough placements.

In order to improve SEN functions to support school improvement:

- develop a more robust performance management system for all specialist support services; and
- ensure that the system to monitor the progress of pupils for whom a statement of special educational need has been made is both rigorous and effective.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to evaluate the EDP more effectively, the LEA should:

- accurately assess the cost-effectiveness of all priority activities; and
- use measurable success criteria to evaluate implementation.

In order to implement the Barnet excellence cluster initiative more effectively, the LEA should:

- ensure that all strand evaluation reports lead to an action plan for future work.

In order to develop further support for gifted and talented pupils:

- use value added data to set realistic but challenging targets for improvement; and
- establish rigorous systems to monitor pupils' progress and identify where further support needs to be targeted.

In order to accelerate development and promote greater continuity in the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- put in place systems to identify and disseminate good practice to all schools throughout the borough.

In order to support the strategic role of the governing body:

- copy significant notes to the chair of governors following visits of school improvement officers, consultants, and other senior LEA officers.

In order to support school governors in making effective contributions to policy and service development:

- work to improve the effectiveness of consultancy procedures; and
 - identify ways in which electronic communication can be employed to improve consultation and information sharing.
-

In order to improve the effectiveness of management support services:

- establish evaluation procedures for all traded services and clarify the benefits of the LEA's combined packages to schools.

In order to improve the use of ICT:

- revise the ICT strategy regularly to reflect the pace of development and changing aspirations.

In order for all schools to make sound decisions about the retention of any element of ICT grant funding:

- explain clearly the amount of funding each school is entitled to receive, the amount the LEA wishes to retain from schools' allocation, and what it intends to use it for.

In order to improve strategies against racism:

- ensure that termly reports on racist incidents are collected from schools and action taken; and
- ensure that monitoring of the implementation of race equality policies within schools is completed.

In order to inform strategic planning of early years work:

- establish robust systems of data collection and evaluation to underpin activity planning.

Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	3	
2	The performance of schools	3	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	3	NI
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	4	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	4	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	4	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	5	
SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	5	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	4	NI
10	The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	5	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	4	NI
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	3	NI
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	NI
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	4	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of minority ethnic and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the minority ethnic and Traveller achievement grants	4	

17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	5	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	5	
19	Support to school governors	3	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	4	
20a	Financial services	4	NI
20b	Human resources	3	
20c	Property services	5	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	5	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	6	
20f	Grounds maintenance	4	
20g	Catering	4	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	3	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	3	NI
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	4	NI
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	4	NI
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	5	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	3	NI
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	5	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	3	NI
SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	6	
30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	4	

31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	5	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	4	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	3	
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	3	NI
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	3	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	4	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	2	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	3	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	5	
SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	5	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	4	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	4	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	4	
48	The quality of advice given to elected members	4	

49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	3	
OVERALL JUDGEMENTS			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	5	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	4	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	5	

JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:

- Grade 1 – Very good
- Grade 2 – Good
- Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory
- Grade 4 – Satisfactory
- Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory
- Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses
- Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools